NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Theologian implores LCWR to remain prophetic

Thomas C. Fox | Aug. 11, 2010

M. Shawn Copeland

DALLAS -- M. Shawn Copeland, professor of theology at Boston College, challenged more than 750 U.S. women religious leaders here to live in a state of radical openness, to be willing to suffer for the mission of the church and to keep their voices full of hope in a difficult time in church history.

Copeland Aug. 11 addressed the annual gathering of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Her talk, and private discussions among the women which followed, were aimed at helping the women to better discern their futures as they operate under the cloud of two Vatican investigations.

Vatican congregations have questioned the fidelity of LCWR to church teachings and are looking into the quality of live in U.S. women religious communities.

Copeland told the women the primary concern in her presentation was to examine the role of women religious in the context of their relationships to the mission of Jesus of Nazareth.

Acknowledging the importance and difficult nature of the moment, she said ?as church, we live in a situation and time of forfeiture and loss, of ambiguity and uncertainty, of breakdown before logical expectations and rational solutions. Surely our situation and time cry out for meaning and grace and hope, for the healing balm and consolation of the Holy Spirit.?

The professor of theology examined what she called three aspects of the nature of Christian commitment: radical openness, suffering and the grace of hope.

Radical openness, she said, ?is living-in-love with God, in other words, living as if only God and God?s creation mattered,? otherwise called Christian discipleship. She added that consecrated life, as an expression of this discipleship, has been and continues to be ?a prophetic beacon of the whole of us as church.?

Jesus, she said, was the prime example of a life lived in radical openness, adding that such a life is bound to be seen as dangerous. She explained that such openness leads to ?compassionate solidarity,? in turn, disrupting social customs and religious practices, eventually threatening authority and power.

?As a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, you should expect to suffer -- expect to be misunderstood and

misinterpreted, insulted and slandered, abandoned and rejected. As a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, you should expect the fate of those called to a prophetic vocation. You should expect crucifixion.?

Copeland addressed the uncertainty in which Christians, especially women religious, find themselves.

?Even as we may disagree about the nature of our predicament, on nearly all accounts, we admit that our tradition is in crisis. The whole of the church is quite bewildered by what we are (or are not) doing, by what is (or is not) happening to us, by what we are (or are not) doing to ourselves.?

In such a situation, she said, prophetic ministry ?not only is needed, it is imperative.?

Copeland then listed five characteristics of prophetic ministry, saying it protests idolatry and ideology, assumes a critical attitude and posture toward established power, reads ?the signs of the times,? uncovering and meeting hidden and neglected human suffering, witnesses unyielding hope that resists despair, and bears the wound of knowledge of the pained heart of God.

Encouraging the assembled women, Copeland concluded that women religious today have become a ?living protest of a perhaps, unintentional, but nonetheless real reduction of ourselves as church to the law-abiding, but lukewarm; the unthinking, but self-righteous; the domineering, but fearful.

?We ?good Catholics? would like to make you -- and you must resist -- into the talisman, the good luck charm of our call to holiness. You must not, indeed, you cannot allow or submit to this. The very nature of prophetic ministry opposes patronage and true prophets are never on sale.?

[Tom Fox is *NCR* editor. His e-mail address is **tfox@ncronline.org**.]

Editor's Note: *NCR* editor Tom Fox is 'tweeting' live from the annual LCWR national assembly in Dallas this week. His Twitter username is @NCRTomFox [1] and you can follow him at twitter.com/NCRTomFox [1]. If you tweet about the assembly use phrase #LCWR so we can follow along.

Stories in this series of *NCR*'s coverage of the national assembly of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious:

- LCWR meets under tight media security [2], Aug. 10
- SNAP to LCWR: model compassion for sex abuse victims [3], Aug. 10
- Wanted: women of spirit in our own time [4], Aug. 11
- Theologian implores LCWR to remain prophetic [5], Aug. 11
- Dallas bishop welcomes LCWR - with media absent [6], Aug. 11
- 'Women religious experiences have implications for entire church' [7], Aug. 12
- LCWR marches against death penalty [8], Aug. 13
- 'We wait in stubborn hope': outgoing LCWR president [9], Aug. 14
- Honored by LCWR, 'elder' speaks of its origins [10], Aug. 16
- LCWR initiatives have global reach [11], Aug. 16

Source URL (retrieved on *04/16/2014 - 14:40*): http://ncronline.org/news/theologian-implores-lcwr-remain-prophetic

Links:
[1] http://twitter.com/NCRtomfox
[2] http://ncronline.org/node/19680
[3] http://ncronline.org/node/19685
[4] http://ncronline.org/node/19691
[5] http://ncronline.org/node/19708
[6] http://ncronline.org/node/19687
[7] http://ncronline.org/node/19733
[8] http://ncronline.org/node/19746
[9] http://ncronline.org/node/19783
[10] http://ncronline.org/node/19800
[11] http://ncronline.org/node/19802